



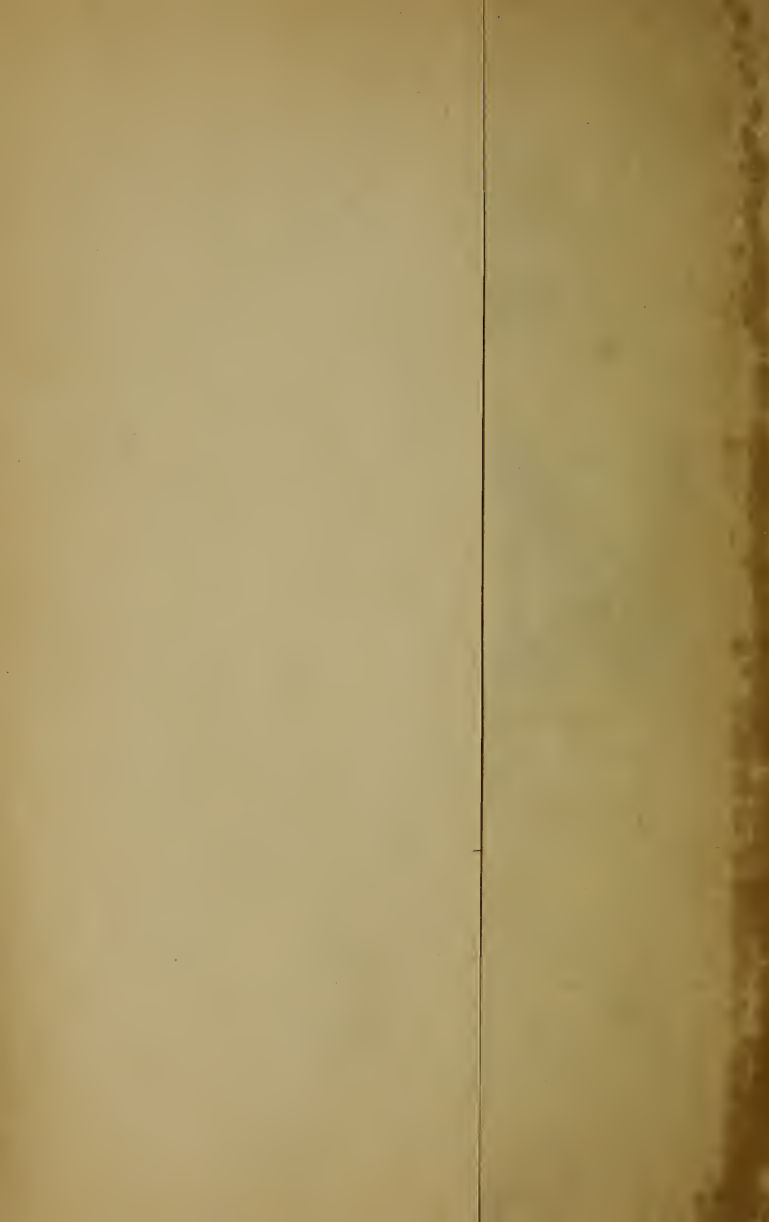
THE STORY
WITHOUT AN
END TRANS-
LATED FROM
THE GERMAN OF F. W.
CAROVÉ BY SARAH AUS-
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THE STORY WITH-
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TRANSLATED FROM THE
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BY SARAH AUSTIN



PORTLAND MAINE
THOMAS B MOSHER
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O. m. Ea

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DEDICATION

To my Daughter.

MY DEAR CHILD,—

The story you love so much in German I dedicate to you in English. It was in compliance with your earnest wish that other children might share the delight it has so often afforded you, that I translated it; so that it is, in some sort, yours of right. Let us hope that your confident expectations of sympathy in your pleasure may not be disappointed; or that, if others think the story less beautiful than you do, they may find compensation in the graceful designs it has inspired.

You have often regretted that it left off so soon, and would, I believe, "have been glad to hear more and more, and for ever." The continuation you have longed for lies in a wide and magnificent book, which contains more wonderful and glorious things than all our favourite fairy-tales put together. But to read in that book, so as to discover all

its beautiful meanings, you must have pure, clear eyes, and an humble, loving heart; otherwise you will complain, as some do, that it is dim and puzzling: or as others, that it is dull and monotonous.

May you continue to read in it with new curiosity, new delight, and new profit; and to find it, as long as you live, the untiring "Story without an End."

Your affectionate Mother,

S. A.

FOREWORD

WHAT Mr. George Saintsbury has called "the exquisite *Story without an End* which Sarah Austin* half adapted, half translated," was first issued in London in 1834, and has since gone through many editions there. An *édition définitif* published in 1868, besides some pleasing designs by E. V. B.† contains a series of old-style chromolithographs that are still charming for all our later refinements in colour printing. In *The Eulogy of Richard Jefferies*, (1888) this volume was undoubtedly in Sir Walter Besant's mind; in his own inimitable, kindly way he tells us:

"There is a very delightful old story which used to be given to children, though I have not seen it for a long time in the hands of any children. It was called '*The Story without an End.*' A child

* For the story of Sarah Austin's life see *Three Generations of English Women* by Janet Ross, (London, 1893).

†The Hon. Mrs. Boyle, compiler of *Ros Rosarum*, that ever-living book of the Rose which should be known for its exquisite contents to all book-lovers everywhere.

wandered among the flowers, who talked to him. That is the whole story. There were coloured pictures in it. The story began without a beginning, and it came to a sudden stop without an ending. It is perhaps upon a reminiscence of this old story that Jefferies has based nearly all his own."

It may occur to some of us that higher testimony to the enduring literary charm of this little translation — or adaptation if you will — could scarcely be asked by the most exigent reader. Still, it adds somewhat to our belated appreciation to find Thomas Carlyle, a life-long friend, writing in acknowledgement of a copy of "the dainty little book":

"It is an *allerliebstes Büchlein*, graceful in spirit as in embodiment and decoration; and we all participate in Lucie's* love of it; but fancy there will be children enough (of six feet high and lower statures) in this 'envy of surrounding nations' to ask: What does it prove, then?"

With such sponsors, who shall say *The Story without an End* has become obsolete? Its old world *naïveté* still touches, even as a child's tiny fingers might touch, our human hearts; still for us exhales a fragrance from flowers that have blossomed and are fadeless after all these fading years.

*The little daughter, Lucie, born in 1821, for whom the story was translated, became in after years, Lady Duff Gordon.

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I

THERE was once a Child who lived in a little hut, and in the hut there was nothing but a little bed, and a looking-glass which hung in a dark corner. Now the Child cared nothing at all about the looking-glass, but as soon as the first sunbeam glided softly through the casement and kissed his sweet eyelids, and the finch and the linnet waked him merrily with their morning songs, he arose, and went out into the green meadow. And he begged flour of the primrose, and sugar of the violet, and butter of the buttercup; he shook dew-drops from the cowslip into the cup of a harebell; spread

out a large lime-leaf, set his little breakfast upon it, and feasted daintily. Sometimes he invited a humming-bee, oftener a gay butterfly, to partake of his feast; but his favourite guest was the blue dragon-fly. The bee murmured a good deal, in a solemn tone, about his riches; but the Child thought that if *he* were a bee, heaps of treasure would not make him gay and happy; and that it must be much more delightful and glorious to float about in the free and fresh breezes of spring, and to hum joyously in the web of the sunbeams, than, with heavy feet and heavy heart, to stow the silver wax and the golden honey into cells.

To this the butterfly assented; and he told how, once on a time, he too had been greedy and sordid; how he had thought of nothing but eating, and had never once turned his eyes upwards to the blue heavens. At length, however, a complete change had come over him; and instead of crawling spiritless about the dirty earth,

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half dreaming, he all at once awaked as out of a deep sleep. And now he could rise into the air;— and it was his greatest joy sometimes to play with the light, and to reflect the heavens in the bright eyes of his wings; sometimes to listen to the soft language of the flowers, and catch their secrets. Such talk delighted the Child, and his breakfast was the sweeter to him, and the sunshine on leaf and flower seemed to him more bright and cheering.

But when the bee had flown off to beg from flower to flower, and the butterfly had fluttered away to his playfellows, the dragon-fly still remained, poised on a blade of grass. Her slender and burnished body, more brightly and deeply blue than the deep blue sky, glistened in the sunbeam; and her net-like wings laughed at the flowers because *they* could not fly, but must stand still and abide the wind and the rain. The dragon-fly sipped a little of the Child's clear dew-drops and

blue violet honey, and then whispered her winged words. And the Child made an end of his repast, closed his dark blue eyes, bent down his beautiful head, and listened to the sweet prattle.

Then the dragon-fly told much of the merry life in the green wood; how sometimes she played hide-and-seek with her playfellows under the broad leaves of the oak and the beech trees; or hunt-the-hare along the surface of the still waters; sometimes quietly watched the sunbeams, as they flew busily from moss to flower and from flower to bush, and shed life and warmth over all. But at night, she said, the moonbeams glided softly around the wood, and dropped dew into the mouths of all the thirsty plants; and when the dawn pelted the slumberers with the soft roses of heaven, some of the half-drunken flowers looked up and smiled; but most of them could not so much as raise their heads for a long, long time.

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Such stories did the dragon-fly tell; and as the Child sat motionless, with his eyes shut, and his head rested on his little hand, she thought he had fallen asleep; —so she poised her double wings and flew into the rustling wood.

II

BUT the Child was only sunk into a dream of delight and was wishing *he* were a sunbeam or a moonbeam; and he would have been glad to hear more and more, and for ever. But at last, as all was still, he opened his eyes and looked around for his dear guest; but she was flown far away; so he could not bear to sit there any longer alone, and he rose and went to the gurgling brook. It gushed and rolled so merrily, and tumbled so wildly along as it hurried to throw itself head-over-heels into the river, just as if the great massy rock out of which it sprang were close behind it, and could only be escaped by a break-neck leap.

Then the Child began to talk to the little waves, and asked them whence they came. They would not stay to give him an answer, but danced away, one over

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another; till at last, that the sweet Child might not be grieved, a drop of water stopped behind a piece of rock. From her the Child heard strange histories, but he could not understand them all, for she told him about her former life, and about the depths of the mountain.

“A long while ago,” said the drop of water, “I lived with my countless sisters in the great ocean, in peace and unity. We had all sorts of pastimes; sometimes we mounted up high into the air, and peeped at the stars; then we sank plump down deep below, and looked how the coral builders work till they are tired, that they may reach the light of day at last. But I was conceited, and thought myself much better than my sisters. And so one day, when the sun rose out of the sea, I clung fast to one of his hot beams, and thought that now I should reach the stars, and become one of them. But I had not ascended far, when the sunbeam shook me off, and, in spite of all I could

say or do, let me fall into a dark cloud. And soon a flash of fire darted through the cloud, and now I thought I must surely die; but the whole cloud laid itself down softly upon the top of a mountain, and so I escaped with my fright and a black eye. Now I thought I should remain hidden, when, all on a sudden, I slipped over a round pebble, fell from one stone to another, down into the depths of the mountain, till at last it was pitch dark, and I could neither see nor hear anything. Then I found, indeed, that 'pride goeth before a fall,' resigned myself to my fate, and, as I had already laid aside all my unhappy pride in the cloud, my portion was now the salt of humility; and after undergoing many purifications from the hidden virtues of metals and minerals, I was at length permitted to come up once more into the free, cheerful air; and now will I run back to my sisters, and there wait patiently till I am called to something better."

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But hardly had she done when the root of a forget-me-not caught the drop of water by her hair and sucked her in, that she might become a floweret, and twinkle brightly as a blue star on the green firmament of earth.

III

THE Child did not very well know what to think of all this; he went thoughtfully home and laid him himself on his little bed; and all night long he was wandering about on the ocean, and among the stars, and over the dark mountain. But the moon loved to look on the slumbering Child as he lay with his little head softly pillowed on his right arm. She lingered a long time before his little window, and went slowly away to lighten the dark chamber of some sick person.

As the moon's soft light lay on the Child's eyelids, he fancied he sat in a golden boat, on a great, great water; countless stars swam glittering on the dark mirror. He stretched out his hand to catch the nearest star, but it had vanished, and the water sprayed up against him. Then he saw clearly that these

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were not the real stars: he looked up to heaven, and wished he could fly thither.

But in the meantime the moon had wandered on her way; and now the Child was led in his dream into the clouds, and he thought he was sitting on a white sheep, and he saw many lambs grazing around him. He tried to catch a little lamb to play with, but it was all mist and vapour; and the Child was sorrowful, and wished himself down again in his own meadow, where his own lamb was sporting gaily about.

Meanwhile the moon was gone to sleep behind the mountains, and all around was dark. Then the Child dreamt that he fell down into the dark, gloomy caverns of the mountain, and at that he was so frightened, that he suddenly awoke, just as morning opened her clear eye over the nearest hill.

IV

THE Child started up, and, to recover himself from his fright, went into the little flower-garden behind his cottage, where the beds were surrounded by ancient palm-trees, and where he knew that all the flowers would nod kindly at him. But, behold, the tulip turned up her nose, and the ranunculus held her head as stiffly as possible, that she might not bow good-morrow to him. The rose, with her fair round cheeks, smiled and greeted the Child lovingly; so he went up to her and kissed her fragrant mouth. And then the rose tenderly complained that he so seldom came into the garden, and that she gave out her bloom and her fragrance the live-long day in vain; for the other flowers could not see her, because they were too low, or did not care to look at her because they themselves were so

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rich in bloom and fragrance. But she was most delighted when she glowed in the blooming head of a child, and could pour out all her heart's secrets to him in sweet odours. Among other things, the rose whispered in his ear that she was the Fulness of Beauty.

And in truth the Child, while looking at her beauty, seemed to have quite forgotten to go on; till the blue larkspur called to him, and asked whether he cared nothing more about his faithful friend; she said that she was unchanged, and that even in death she should look upon him with eyes of unfading blue.

The Child thanked her for her true-heartedness, and passed on to the hyacinth, who stood near the puffy, full-cheeked, gaudy tulips. Even from a distance the hyacinth sent forth kisses to him, for she knew not how to express her love. Although she was not remarkable for her beauty, yet the Child felt himself wondrously attracted by her, for he thought

nó flower loved him so well. But the hyacinth poured out her full heart and wept bitterly, because she stood so lonely; the tulips indeed were her countrymen, but they were so cold and unfeeling that she was ashamed of them. The Child encouraged her, and told her he did not think things were so bad as she fancied. The tulips spoke their love in bright looks, while she uttered hers in fragrant words; that these, indeed, were lovelier and more intelligible, but that the others were not to be despised.

Then the hyacinth was comforted, and said she would be content; and the Child went on to the powdered auricula, who, in her bashfulness, looked kindly up to him, and would gladly have given him more than kind looks, had she had more to give. But the Child was satisfied with her modest greeting; he felt that he was poor too, and he saw the deep, thoughtful colours that lay beneath her golden dust. But the humble flower, of her own accord,

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sent him to her neighbour, the lily, whom she willingly acknowledged as her queen. And when the Child came to the lily, the slender flower waved to and fro, and bowed her pale head with gentle pride and stately modesty, and sent forth a fragrant greeting to him. The Child knew not what had come to him: it reached his inmost heart, so that his eyes filled with soft tears. Then he marked how the lily gazed with a clear and steadfast eye upon the sun, and how the sun looked down again into her pure chalice, and how, amid this interchange of looks, the three golden threads united in the centre. And the Child heard how one scarlet lady-bird at the bottom of the cup said to another, "Knowest thou not that we dwell in the flower of heaven?" and the other replied, "Yes, and now will the mystery be fulfilled."

And as the Child saw and heard all this, the dim image of his unknown parents, as it were veiled in a holy light, floated

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before his eyes : he strove to grasp it, but the light was gone, and the Child slipped, and would have fallen, had not the branch of a currant bush caught and held him ; he took some of the bright berries* for his morning's meal, and went back to his hut and stripped the little branches.

*The red currant is called in Germany, *Johannisbeere*, St. John's berry.

V

I N the hut he stayed not long, all was so gloomy, close, and silent within; and abroad everything seemed to smile, and to exult in the clear and unbounded space. Therefore the Child went out into the green wood, of which the dragon-fly had told him such pleasant stories. But he found everything far more beautiful and lovely even than she had described it; for all about, wherever he went, the tender moss pressed his little feet, and the delicate grass embraced his knees, and the flowers kissed his hands, and even the branches stroked his cheeks with a kind and refreshing touch, and the high trees threw their fragrant shade around him.

There was no end to his delight. The little birds warbled and sang, and fluttered and hopped about, and the delicate wood-

flowers gave out their beauty and their odours; and every sweet sound took a sweet odour by the hand, and thus walked through the open door of the Child's heart, and held a joyous nuptial dance therein. But the nightingale and the lily of the valley led the dance; for the nightingale sang of nought but love, and the lily breathed of nought but innocence, and he was the bridegroom and she was the bride. And the nightingale was never weary of repeating the same thing a hundred times over, for the spring of love which gushed from his heart was ever new; and the lily bowed her head bashfully, that no one might see her glowing heart. And yet the one lived so solely and entirely in the other, that no one could see whether the notes of the nightingale were floating lilies, or the lilies visible notes, falling like dew-drops from the nightingale's throat.

The Child's heart was full of joy even to the brim. He set himself down, and

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he almost thought he should like to take root there, and live for ever among the sweet plants and flowers, and so become a true sharer in all their gentle pleasures. For he felt a deep delight in the still, secluded, twilight existence of the mosses and small herbs, which felt not the storm, nor the frost, nor the scorching sunbeam; but dwelt quietly among their many friends and neighbours, feasting in peace and good fellowship on the dew and cool shadows which the mighty trees shed upon them. To them it was a high festival when a sunbeam chanced to visit their lowly home; whilst the tops of the lofty trees could find joy and beauty only in the purple rays of morning or evening.

VI

AND as the Child sat there, a little mouse rustled from among the dry leaves of the former year, and a lizard half glided from a crevice in the rock, and both of them fixed their bright eyes upon the little stranger; and when they saw that he designed them no evil, they took courage and came nearer to him.

“I should like to live with you,” said the Child to the two little creatures, in a soft, subdued voice, that he might not frighten them. “Your chambers are so snug, so warm, and yet so shaded, and the flowers grow in at your windows, and the birds sing you their morning song, and call you to table and to bed with their clear warblings.”

“Yes,” said the mouse, “it would be all very well if all the plants bore nuts and mast, instead of those silly flowers;

and if I were not obliged to grub under ground in the spring, and gnaw the bitter roots, whilst they are dressing themselves in their fine flowers, and flaunting it to the world, as if they had endless stores of honey in their cellars."

"Hold your tongue," interrupted the lizard, pertly; "do you think, because you are grey, that other people must throw away their handsome clothes, or let them lie in the dark wardrobe under ground, and wear nothing but grey too? I am not so envious. The flowers may dress themselves as they like for me; they pay for it out of their own pockets, and they feed bees and beetles from their cups; but what I want to know is, of what use are birds in the world? Such a fluttering and chattering, truly, from morning early to evening late, that one is worried and stunned to death, and there is never a day's peace for them. And they do nothing; only snap up the flies and the spiders out of the mouths of such as I. For my

part, I should be perfectly satisfied, provided all the birds in the world were flies and beetles.”

The Child changed colour, and his heart was sick and saddened when he heard their evil tongues. He could not imagine how anybody could speak ill of the beautiful flowers, or scoff at his beloved birds. He was waked out of a sweet dream, and the wood seemed to him lonely and desert, and he was ill at ease. He started up hastily, so that the mouse and the lizard shrank back alarmed, and did not look around them till they thought themselves safe out of the reach of the stranger with the large severe eyes.

VII

BUT the Child went away from the place; and as he hung down his head thoughtfully, he did not observe that he took the wrong path, nor see how the flowers on either side bowed their heads to welcome him, nor hear how the old birds from the boughs, and the young from the nests, cried aloud to him, "God bless thee, our dear little prince!" And he went on, and on, farther and farther into the deep wood; and he thought over the foolish and heartless talk of the two selfish chatterers, and could not understand it. He would fain have forgotten it, but he could not. And the more he pondered, the more it seemed to him as if a malicious spider had spun her web around him, and as if his eyes were weary with trying to look through it.

And suddenly he came to a still water,

above which young beeches lovingly entwined their arms. He looked in the water, and his eyes were riveted to it as if by enchantment. He could not move, but stood and gazed in the soft, placid mirror, from the bosom of which the tender green foliage, with the deep blue heavens between, gleamed so wondrously upon him. His sorrow was all forgotten, and even the echo of the discord in his little heart was hushed. That heart was once more in his eyes; and fain would he have drunk in the soft beauty of the colours that lay beneath him, or have plunged into the lovely deep.

Then the breeze began to sigh among the tree-tops. The Child raised his eyes and saw overhead the quivering green, and the deep blue behind it, and he knew not whether he were awake or dreaming: which were the real leaves and the real heaven,—those in the heights above, or in the depths beneath? Long did the Child waver, and his thoughts floated in

a delicious dreaminess from one to the other, till the dragon-fly flew to him in affectionate haste, and with rustling wings greeted her kind host. The Child returned her greeting, and was glad to meet an acquaintance with whom he could share the rich feast of his joy. But first he asked the dragon-fly if she could decide for him between the Upper and the Nether—the height and the depth? The dragon-fly flew above, and beneath, and around; but the water spake:—“The foliage and the sky above are not the true ones: the leaves wither and fall; the sky is often overcast, and sometimes quite dark.” Then the leaves and the sky said, “The water only apes us; it must change its pictures at our pleasure, and can retain none.” Then the dragon-fly remarked that the height and the depth existed only in the eyes of the Child, and that the leaves and the sky were true and real only in his thoughts; because in the mind alone the picture was permanent and en-

during, and could be carried with him whithersoever he went.

This she said to the Child; but she immediately warned him to return, for the leaves were already beating the tattoo in the evening breeze, and the lights were disappearing one by one in every corner. Then the Child confessed to her with alarm that he knew not how he should find the way back, and that he feared the dark night would overtake him if he attempted to go home alone; so the dragon-fly flew on before him and showed him a cave in the rock where he might pass the night. And the Child was well content; for he had often wished to try if he could sleep out of his accustomed bed.

VIII

BUT the dragon-fly was fleet, and gratitude strengthened her wings to pay her host the honour she owed him. And truly, in the dim twilight good counsel and guidance were scarce. She flitted hither and thither without knowing rightly what was to be done; when, by the last vanishing sunbeam, she saw hanging on the edge of the cave some strawberries who had drunk so deep of the evening red that their heads were quite heavy. Then she flew up to a harebell who stood near, and whispered in her ear that the lord and king of all the flowers was in the wood, and ought to be received and welcomed as beseemed his dignity. Aglaia did not need that this should be repeated. She began to ring her sweet bells with all her might; and when her neighbour heard the sound, she rang hers also; and soon

all the harebells, great and small, were in motion, and rang as if it had been for the nuptials of their mother earth herself with the prince of the sun. The tone of the blue bells was deep and rich and that of the white, high and clear, and all blended together in a delicious harmony.

But the birds were fast asleep in their high nests, and the ears of the other animals were not delicate enough, or were too much overgrown with hair, to hear them. The fire-flies alone heard the joyous peal, for they were akin to the flowers, through their common ancestor, light. They inquired of their nearest relation, the lily of the valley, and from her they heard that a large flower had just passed along the foot-path more blooming than the loveliest rose, and with two stars more brilliant than those of the brightest fire-fly, and that it must needs be their king. Then all the fire-flies flew up and down the foot-path, and sought everywhere till at length they

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came, as the dragon-fly had hoped they would, to the cave.

And now, as they looked at the Child, and every one of them saw itself reflected in his clear eyes, they rejoiced exceedingly, and called all their fellows together, and alighted on the bushes all around; and soon it was so light in the cave that herb and grass began to grow as if it had been broad day. Now, indeed, was the joy and triumph of the dragon-fly complete. The Child was delighted with the merry and silvery tones of the bells, and with the many little bright-eyed companions around him, and with the deep red strawberries which bowed down their heads to his touch.

IX

AND when he had eaten his fill, he sat down on the soft moss, crossed one little leg over the other and began to gossip with the fire-flies. And as he so often thought on his unknown parents, he asked them who were their parents. Then the one nearest to him gave him answer; and he told how that they were formerly flowers, but none of those who thrust their rooty hands greedily into the ground and draw nourishment from the dingy earth, only to make themselves fat and large withal; but that the light was dearer to them than anything, even at night; and while the other flowers slept, they gazed unwearied on the light, and drank it in with eager adoration,—sun, and moon, and star light. And the light had so thoroughly purified them, that they had not sucked in poisonous juices

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like the yellow flowers of the earth, but sweet odours for sick and fainting hearts, and oil of potent ethereal virtue for the weak and the wounded; and at length, when their autumn came, they did not, like the others, wither and sink down, leaf and flower, to be swallowed up by the darksome earth, but shook off their earthly garment, and mounted aloft into the clear air. But there it was so wondrously bright, that sight failed them; and when they came to themselves again, they were fire-flies, each sitting on a withered flower-stalk.

And now the Child liked the bright-eyed flies better than ever; and he talked a little longer with them, and inquired why they showed themselves so much more in spring. They did it, they said, in the hope that their gold-green radiance might allure their cousins, the flowers, to the pure love of light.

X

DURING this conversation, the dragon-fly had been preparing a bed for her host. The moss upon which the Child sat had grown a foot high behind his back, out of pure joy; but the dragon-fly and her sisters had so revelled upon it, that it was now laid at its length along the cave. The dragon-fly had awakened every spider in the neighbourhood out of her sleep, and when they saw the brilliant light they had set to work spinning so industriously that their web hung down like a curtain before the mouth of the cave. But as the Child saw the ant peeping up at him, he entreated the fire-flies not to deprive themselves any longer of their merry games in the wood on his account. And the dragon-fly and her sisters raised the curtain till the Child had lain him down to rest, and then let

it fall again, that the mischievous gnats might not get in to disturb his slumbers.

The Child laid himself down to sleep, for he was very tired; but he could not sleep, for his couch of moss was quite another thing than his little bed, and the cave was all strange to him. He turned himself on one side and then on the other, and as nothing would do, he raised himself and sat upright, to wait till sleep might choose to come. But sleep would not come at all;—and the only wakeful eyes in the whole wood were the Child's. For the harebells had rung themselves weary, and the fire-flies had flown about till they were tired, and even the dragon-fly, who would fain have kept watch in front of the cave, had dropped sound asleep.

The wood grew stiller and stiller; here and there fell a dry leaf which had been driven from its old dwelling-place by a fresh one; here and there a young bird gave a soft chirp when its mother squeezed

it in the nest;—and from time to time a gnat hummed for a minute or two in the curtain, till a spider crept on tiptoe along its web, and gave him such a gripe in the wind-pipe as soon spoiled his trumpeting.

And the deeper the silence became, the more intently did the Child listen, and at last the slightest sound thrilled him from head to foot. At length, all was still as death in the wood; and the world seemed as if it never would wake again. The Child bent forward to see whether it were as dark abroad as in the cave, but he saw nothing save the pitch-dark night, who had wrapped everything in her thick veil. Yet as he looked upwards his eyes met the friendly glance of two or three stars, and this was a most joyful surprise to him, for he felt himself no longer so entirely alone. The stars were indeed far, far away, but yet he knew them, and they knew him; for they looked into his eyes.

The Child's whole soul was fixed in his gaze; and it seemed to him as if he must

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needs fly out of the darksome cave thither, where the stars were beaming with such pure and serene light; and he felt how poor and lowly he was, when he thought of their brilliancy; and how cramped and fettered, when he thought of their free unbounded course along the heavens.

XI

BUT the stars went on their course, and left their glittering picture only a little while before the Child's eyes. Even this faded, and then vanished quite away. And he was beginning to feel tired, and to wish to lay himself down again, when a flickering Will-o'-the-wisp appeared from behind a bush,—so that the Child thought, at first, one of the stars had wandered out of its way and had come to visit him, and to take him with it. And the Child breathed quick with joy and surprise, and then the Will-o'-the-wisp came nearer, and set himself down on a damp mossy stone in front of the cave, and another fluttered quickly after him, and sat down over-against him, and sighed, deeply, “Thank God, then, that I can rest at last!”

“Yes,” said the other, “for that you

may thank the innocent Child who sleeps there within; it was his pure breath that freed us.”—“Are you then,” said the Child, hesitatingly, “not of yon stars which wander so brightly there above?”—“Oh, if we were stars,” replied the first, “we should pursue our tranquil path through the pure element, and should leave this wood and the whole darksome earth to itself.”—“And not,” said the other, “sit brooding on the face of the shallow pool.”

The Child was curious to know who these could be who shone so beautifully, and yet seemed so discontented. Then the first began to relate how he had been a child too, and how, as he grew up, it had always been his greatest delight to deceive people and play them tricks, to show his wit and cleverness. He had always, he said, poured such a stream of smooth words over people, and encompassed himself with such a shining mist, that men had been attracted by it to their

own hurt. But once on a time there appeared a plain man, who only spoke two or three simple words, and suddenly the bright mist vanished, and left him naked and deformed, to the scorn and mockery of the whole world. But the man had turned away his face from him in pity, while he was almost dead with shame and anger. And when he came to himself again, he knew not what had befallen him, till at length he found that it was his fate to hover, without rest or change, over the surface of the bog as a Will-o'-the-wisp.

“With me it fell out quite otherwise,” said the first: “instead of giving light without warmth, as I now do, I burned without shining. When I was only a child, people gave way to me in everything, so that I was intoxicated with self-love. If I saw any one shine, I longed to put out his light; and the more intensely I wished this, the more did my own small glimmering turn back upon myself, and inwardly burn fiercely while all without was darker

than ever. But if any one who shone more brightly would have kindly given me of his light, then did my inward flame burst forth to destroy him. But the flame passed through the light and harmed it not; it shone only the more brightly, while I was withered and exhausted. And once upon a time I met a little smiling child, who played with a cross of palm branches, and wore a beamy coronet around his golden locks. He took me kindly by the hand and said, 'My friend, you are now very gloomy and sad, but if you will become a child again, even as I am, you will have a bright circlet such as I have.' When I heard that, I was so angry with myself and with the child, that I was scorched by my inward fire. Now would I fain fly up to the sun to fetch rays from him, but the rays drove me back with these words: 'Return thither whence thou camest, thou dark fire of envy, for the sun lightens only in love; the greedy earth, indeed, sometimes turns his mild light into

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scorching fire. Fly back, then, for with thy like alone must thou dwell.' I fell, and when I recovered myself, I was glimmering coldly above the stagnant waters."

While they were talking, the Child had fallen asleep; for he knew nothing of the world, nor of men, and he could make nothing of their stories. Weariness had spoken a more intelligible language to him — *that* he understood, and had fallen asleep.

XII

SOFTLY and soundly he slept till the rosy morning clouds stood upon the mountain, and announced the coming of their lord the sun. But as soon as the tidings spread over field and wood, the thousand-voiced echo awoke, and sleep was no more to be thought of. And soon did the royal sun himself arise; at first, his dazzling diadem alone appeared above the mountains; at length he stood upon their summit in the full majesty of his beauty, in all the charms of eternal youth, bright and glorious, his kindly glance embracing every creature of earth, from the stately oak to the blade of grass bending under the foot of the wayfaring man.

Then arose from every breast, from every throat, the joyous song of praise; and it was as if the whole plain and wood were become a temple, whose roof was

the heaven, whose altar the mountain, whose congregation all creatures, whose priest the sun.

But the Child walked forth and was glad, for the birds sang sweetly, and it seemed to him as if everything sported and danced out of mere joy to be alive. Here flew two finches through the thicket, and, twittering, pursued each other; there, the young buds burst asunder, and the tender leaves peeped out and expanded themselves in the warm sun, as if they would abide in his glance for ever; here, a dew-drop trembled, sparkling and twinkling on a blade of grass, and knew not that beneath him stood a little moss who was thirsting after him; there, troops of flies flew aloft, as if they would soar far over the wood; and so all was life and motion, and the Child's heart joyed to see it.

He sat down on a little smooth plot of turf, shaded by the branches of a nut-bush, and thought he should now sip the cup

of his delight drop by drop. And first he plucked down some brambles which threatened him with their prickles; then he bent aside some branches which concealed the view; then he removed the stones, so that he might stretch out his feet at full length on the soft turf; and when he had done all this, he bethought himself what was yet to do; and as he found nothing, he stood up to look for his acquaintance the dragon-fly, and to beg her to guide him once more out of the wood into the open fields. About midway he met her, and she began to excuse herself for having fallen asleep in the night. The Child thought not of the past, were it even but a minute ago, so earnestly did he now wish to get out from among the thick and close trees; for his heart beat high, and he felt as if he should breathe freer in the open ground. The dragon-fly flew on before, and showed him the way as far as the outermost verge of the wood, whence the Child could espy

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his own little hut, and then flew away to her playfellows.

XIII

THE Child walked forth alone upon the fresh dewy corn-field. A thousand little suns glittered in his eyes, and a lark soared warbling above his head. And the lark proclaimed the joys of the coming year, and awakened endless hopes, while she soared circling higher and higher, till at length her song was like the soft whisper of an angel holding converse with the spring under the blue arch of heaven. The Child had seen the earth-coloured little bird rise up before him, and it seemed to him as if the earth had sent her forth from her bosom as a messenger to carry her joy and her thanks up to the sun, because he had turned his beaming countenance again upon her in love and bounty. And the lark hung poised above the hope-giving field, and warbled her clear and joyous song.

She sang of the loveliness of the rosy dawn, and the fresh brilliancy of the earliest sunbeams; of the gladsome springing of the young flowers, and the vigorous shooting of the corn; and her song pleased the Child beyond measure.

But the lark wheeled in higher and higher circles, and her song sounded softer and sweeter.

And now she sang of the first delights of early love, of wanderings together on the sunny fresh hill-tops, and of the sweet pictures and visions that arise out of the blue and misty distance. The Child understood not rightly what he heard, and fain would he have understood, for he thought that even in such visions must be wondrous delight. He gazed aloft after the unwearied bird, but she had disappeared in the morning mist.

Then the Child leaned his head on one shoulder to listen if he could no longer hear the little messenger of spring; and he could just catch the distant and quiver-

ing notes in which she sang of the fervent longing after the clear element of freedom; after the pure all-present light; and of the blessed foretaste of this desired enfranchisement, of this blending in the sea of celestial happiness.

Yet longer did he listen; for the tones of her song carried him there, where, as yet, his thoughts had never reached, and he felt himself happier in this short and imperfect flight than ever he had felt before. But the lark now dropped suddenly to the earth, for her little body was too heavy for the ambient ether, and her wings were not large nor strong enough for the pure element.

Then the red corn-poppies laughed at the homely-looking bird, and cried to one another and to the surrounding blades of corn in a shrill voice, "Now, indeed, you may see what comes of flying so high, and striving and straining after mere air; people only lose their time, and bring back nothing but weary wings and an

empty stomach. That vulgar-looking ill-dressed little creature would fain raise herself above us all, and has kept up a mighty noise. And now, there she lies on the ground, and can hardly breathe, while we have stood still where we are sure of a good meal, and have stayed like people of sense where there is something substantial to be had; and in the time she has been fluttering and singing, we have grown a good deal taller and fatter."

The other little red-caps chattered and screamed their assent so loud, that the Child's ears tingled, and he wished he could chastise them for their spiteful jeers; when a cyane said, in a soft voice, to her younger playmates, "Dear friends, be not led astray by outward show, nor by discourse which regards only outward show. The lark is indeed weary, and the space into which she has soared is void; but the void is not what the lark sought, nor is the seeker returned empty home. She strove after light and freedom, and

light and freedom has she proclaimed. She left the earth and its enjoyments, but she has drunk of the pure air of heaven, and has seen that it is not the earth, but the sun that is steadfast. And if earth has called her back, it can keep nothing of her but what is its own. Her sweet voice and her soaring wings belong to the sun, and will enter into light and freedom long after the foolish prater shall have sunk and been buried in the dark prison of the earth."

And the lark heard her wise and friendly discourse, and, with renewed strength, she sprang once more into the clear and beautiful blue.

Then the Child clapped his little hands for joy that the sweet bird had flown up again, and that the red-caps must hold their tongues for shame.

XIV

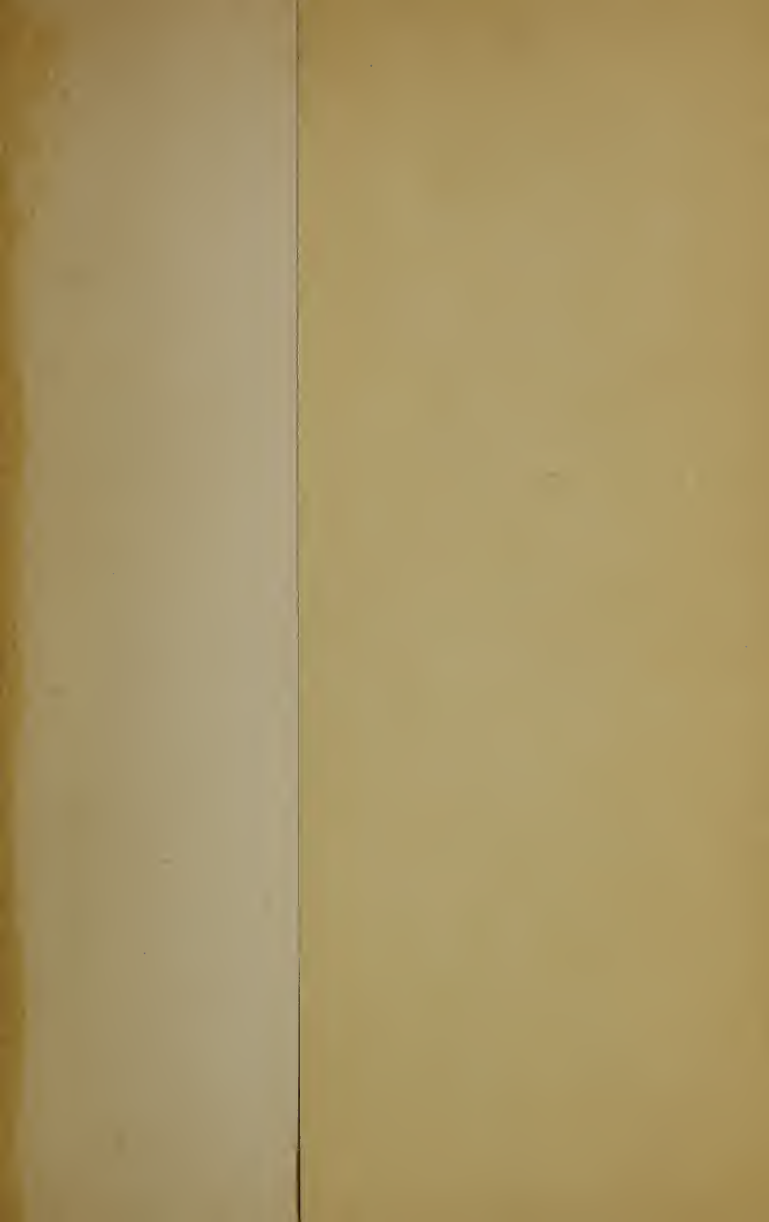
AND the Child was become happy and joyful, and breathed freely again, and thought no more of returning to his hut; for he saw that nothing returned inwards, but rather that all strove outwards into the free air; the rosy apple-blossoms from their narrow buds, and the gurgling notes from the narrow breast of the lark. The germs burst open the folding doors of the seeds, and broke through the heavy pressure of the earth in order to get at the light; the grasses tore asunder their bands, and their slender blades sprang upward. Even the rocks were become gentle, and allowed little mosses to peep out from their sides, as a sign that they would not remain impenetrably closed for ever. And the flowers sent out colour and fragrance into the whole world, for they kept not their best for themselves,

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but would imitate the sun and the stars, which poured their warmth and radiance over the spring. And many a little gnat and beetle burst the narrow cell in which it was inclosed, and crept out slowly, and, half asleep, unfolded and shook its tender wings, and soon gained strength, and flew off to untried delights. And as the butterflies came forth from their chrysalids in all their gaiety and splendour, so did every humbled and suppressed aspiration and hope free itself, and boldly launch into the open and flowing sea of spring.



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